

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
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FOR
THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and distinguished Members of the Committee. First of all I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for allowing me the honor to appear before you today. I would also like to praise the Committee Members for conducting an oversight hearing on such a significant issue.

My name is Nelson J. Villegas and it is indeed a privilege for me to share my experience as I transitioned from the Department of Defense to the Department of Veterans' Affairs health care services. As I look back I ask myself the following question, was I provided with seamless health care coverage during my transition? The answer is, absolutely.

On May 3rd 2003 I was medically evacuated from Germany to Walter Reed Army Medical Center for further management of severe rhabdomyolysis and lactic acidosis with subsequent compartment syndrome. Furthermore, my hospital course was complicated by blood loss, renal and respiratory failure. As a result, I underwent a bilateral below the knee amputation just before Mother's Day.

My prognosis was tenuous at best and expected to expire within 72 hours. An expeditious medical retirement took place based on death being imminent. This would secure my retired status and greater benefits for the next of kin. Therefore, I was medically retired from active duty on May 7th 2003. I gained consciousness a week later and suddenly became aware of my condition.

My new status as a retiree presented me with unthinkable personal challenges that needed to be met. These included pay issues, living arrangements, property management and transportation. The procurement of durable medical equipment and prosthetic care were also of great concern. All of these obstacles were surpassed thanks to coordinating efforts between the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans' Affairs staff.

Currently, I receive care interchangeably from both departments without any complications. All of my physical rehabilitation, prosthetic fittings and medical follow-ups take place at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. I seek dental care, driving rehabilitation and the acquisition of medical equipment from the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

I have scheduled several appointments within both institutions and have being seen shortly after requesting an appointment. Also, medical equipment ordered has arrived within a reasonable time. Evidently, an aggressive effort has being made on their part in order to provide me with the best care possible. The high level of concern expressed by both hospitals regarding my disability bears witness to their joint commitment to care for veterans just like myself.

Furthermore, to my relief, the existence of the Foreign Medical Program has reassure me that future care of conditions related to my disability will be properly covered overseas. Also, the Vocational Rehabilitation program has made possible for me to continue pursuing my educational and employment goals. Also, disability compensation payments provide me with means of subsistence that I would otherwise be unable to attain.

Whether I was an active duty soldier or retiree, either an inpatient or an outpatient; the continuum of care that I received at both hospitals has being nothing other than excellent. I have being treated with the outmost professionalism and respect. Therefore, my transition before and after my medical discharge was completely seamless and transparent regardless of my unique situation.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for granting me the opportunity to share my testimony before such an honorable group of our society.